



MISSOULA
COUNTY

Crime Victim Advocate Program

317 Woody Street

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Missoula MT 59802-4292

Relationship Violence Services | A Division of the Department of Grants and Community Programs

SENATE JUDICIARY

Exhibit No. 23

Date: 4/8/15

Bill No. MISSOULA

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April 8, 2015

To: Senate Judiciary Committee
From: Missoula Relationship Violence Services of the Department of Grants and Community Programs
Re: SJ 24, sponsored by Senator Diane Sands – Requesting an Interim Study of Sexual Assault in Montana, and requiring that the final results of the study be reported to the 65th Legislature

Relationship Violence Services (RVS), a Division of the Missoula Department of Grants and Community Programs, appreciates the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of SJ-24. RVS—established in 1985 as the Crime Victim Advocate Program (now a core program under the umbrella of RVS)—is one of the oldest legal advocacy programs in Montana. Our program provides free and confidential assistance to victims of relationship violence, sexual assault, stalking, and other violent crimes by offering advocacy and resource information in civil and criminal matters. We strongly support SJ 24 sponsored by Senator Sands.

SJ 24 would request the Legislative Council to designate an appropriate interim committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, or direct sufficient staff resources to examine sexual assault in Montana. In a state where sexually violent acts are too frequent, take place in a variety of circumstances and settings, and where we do not as responders and concerned community members have access to an in-depth report of sexual assault and its aftermath in Montana, the proposed interim study is vital.

- RVS serves all victims of sexual assault who seek help from us. We work in a system of coordinated community response with responders in the criminal justice system and victim service providers in Missoula, such as the YWCA, the Student Advocacy Resource Center (SARC) at the University of Montana, and First Step (the comprehensive medical sexual assault treatment program at St. Patrick Hospital). This work has established the importance of responding to victims of sexual assault comprehensively and compassionately in order to help them receive justice and provide them with the initial steps toward healing and getting their lives back after such a fundamentally violating and violent crime.
- Missoula's recent widely publicized experience of having the Missoula Police Department (MPD), the University of Montana Police Department (UMPD), and Missoula County Attorney's Office (MCAO) come under scrutiny of the Department of Justice for failing to respond to reports of sexual assault in an adequate way underscores the importance of undertaking a statewide study as proposed in SJ-24.
- Each of the three agencies now has a separate agreement with varying parameters, and each was assigned to develop specialized policies and standard operating procedures (SOPs) to fairly and effectively respond to victims of sexual violence and receive training on sexual assault and trauma. As part of the 2013 agreement, the MPD was called to convene a team to audit the entire system and community response to Sexual Violence. Recommendations from the Safety and Accountability Audit that began in the spring of 2014 are anticipated to be released in late April, 2015. This work in response to the OJP investigation could be a useful component of the report proposed in SJ-24.
- Holding sexual assault offenders accountable and responding as well as possible to victims throughout Montana is critically important. These violent offenders create untold trauma in the lives of their victims. Rape is one of the most violent and damaging of crimes, one that can move from sexual assault to homicide in a matter of seconds. The intervention of law enforcement and the criminal justice system is sometimes the only life line a victim has. Our statutes and responses should protect the innocent and hold the perpetrators accountable. The proposed study would help responders and communities—and Montana as a whole—to develop the best policies and procedures we are capable of in response.

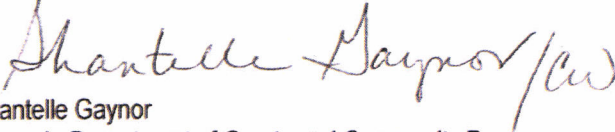


CRIME VICTIM ADVOCATE PROGRAM
Missoula County Department of Grants and Community Programs

Support. Safety. Hope.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important issue. I strongly urge you to vote **YES on SJ 24** and move it forward for consideration. I am available to provide further information if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shantelle Gaynor" followed by the initials "CW" in a larger, more stylized font.

Shantelle Gaynor
Missoula Department of Grants and Community Programs
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